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Confession time

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The *New Statesman*, that excellent weekly of the British moderate Left, reaches me by a roundabout route. It is sent by some friends in London to *The Progressive*'s Roving Editor, Milton Mayer, at his home in Carmel, California. Milton reads each issue carefully, and occasionally scribles a postcard calling my attention to one or another article. Then he sends the magazine along by the cheapest (and slowest) class of mail, being notoriously unwilling to spend a penny more than absolutely necessary on such frivolities as postage stamps. ("That's how I got rich," he explains.)

When the magazine arrives at *The Progressive*'s office, it is carefully deposited atop the pile of other publications, clippings, memos, unsolicited manuscripts, unanswered letters, and miscellaneous pieces of paper that clutter my desk to a depth of six or eight inches.

So it was only a few days ago that I found myself thumbing through the *New Statesman* for December 29, 1978, and encountered an article headed "EXCLUSIVE! *New Statesman* editor in pay of British security services." The article began:

"Clifford Sharp, the first editor of the *New Statesman*, was recruited by the British security services shortly after the Russian Revolution. Their objective was to manipulate his magazine and use it as part of the propaganda war on Bolshevism.

"This piquant fact emerges from a study of Public Record Office files dealing with the period immediately after the First World War. Although many details remain sketchy, it does appear to constitute the first known example of the state attempting peacetime manipulation of an 'independent' press for purposes of covert propaganda.

"The Cold War achievement of the CIA in funding magazines like *Encounter* through the Congress of Cultural Freedom remains impressive but now seems less original. It appears that this technique, like most of the others in the CIA's comprehensive bag of dirty tricks, was first patented in Britain."

The article went on to give the details (or as many as could be learned) of Clifford Sharp's involvement with the Secret Intelligence Service and the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. Eventually, it noted, he "evidently came to regret his flirtation with the security services, and his increasingly heavy drinking may have been the symptom of a deep unease."

The particulars, remote in time and place, did not interest me much, but I am impressed with the *New Statesman*'s commendable candor. And I wonder whether some publications on this side of the Atlantic might not wish to follow this splendid example by disclosing the "piquant facts" of their own past (though admittedly more recent) affiliations with the CIA.

That such affiliations existed — and still exist — I have no doubt. Indeed, there have been a few isolated and fragmented disclosures in the last year or two — constituting, I suspect, only the tiniest tip of the iceberg.

One evening in the spring of 1960, when I was a reporter on the staff of *The Washington Post*, I shared an elevator with one of the paper's senior editors. In the brief ride from the fifth floor to street level, we talked about the day's big news story: the Soviet downing of an American U-2 spy plane and the capture of its pilot, Francis Gary Powers.

"We've known about those flights for a couple of years," the editor said, "but we were asked not to write anything."

In my youthful innocence, I was both astonished and dismayed. How many other stories were my editors suppressing because they had been "asked"? And who did the asking? In due course I learned, by means of discreet inquiry, that *The Post*, like other major news media, maintained "contacts" with the CIA in order to receive "guidance" on "sensitive" stories.

There must be some reporters and editors and publishers out there who, like the late Clifford Sharp, are afflicted by "a deep unease" (not to mention "increasingly heavy drinking"). It would be best, of course, if they could tell about their "contacts" with the CIA in the media that employ (or employed) them, so that the readers of those publications could enjoy the insights of disclosure. But if that should prove inconvenient, *The Progressive* will cheerfully make its pages available.

We should not have to wait until some musty archives are opened in another sixty years. ■

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